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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 001893

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EAP/MLS FOR AARON COPE
EAP/MTS FOR MICHAEL TAYLOR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2017
TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM SN BU ASEAN
SUBJECT: DEMARCHE: URGING ASEAN LEADERSHIP ON BURMA

REF: STATE 142628

Classified By: CDA Daniel Shields, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: CDA met with MFA Permanent Secretary Bilahari Kausikan and delivered reftel message urging ASEAN leadership on Burma and suggesting that ASEAN consider appointing a high-level envoy to Burma. Kausikan agreed that ASEAN should continue to press Burma for meaningful change and support UN Security Council and UN Special Advisor Gambari's efforts. He said ASEAN would be able to convey its views to Burma "at some level" in ASEAN meetings now through the November summit, but he questioned whether Burma's representatives would have enough seniority or courage to convey tough messages to regime leaders. Kausikan said Singapore will consider carefully the idea of an ASEAN envoy. The key is whether such an envoy will actually help rather than hinder Gambari's efforts. Kausikan said he is personally skeptical that an ASEAN envoy will help and he raised a number of questions, including regarding just how strongly Gambari himself supports the idea of an ASEAN envoy. Kausikan stressed, however, the Singapore will consider the idea carefully. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) In the absence of Foreign Minister George Yeo (who is traveling in China), Charge and EP Chief met MFA Perm Sec Bilahari Kausikan October 12 to deliver reftel message urging ASEAN leadership on Burma and suggesting that ASEAN consider appointing a high-level envoy to Burma. Kausikan agreed with the our points regarding ASEAN's pressing the regime to cease raids and arrests, release political prisoners, and begin a genuine dialogue; ASEAN's publicly expressing full support for UN Special Advisor Gambari's mission; and the need for ASEAN's continued support of UN Security Council engagement. Kausikan thought ASEAN would have an opportunity to press Burma in ASEAN meetings from now through the mid-November ASEAN summit, though he questioned whether Burma would send representatives with the seniority and courage to report tough messages faithfully to regime leaders in Burma.

¶13. (C) Kausikan promised that the GOS will consider carefully the idea of a high-level ASEAN envoy. The key is whether such an envoy will actually help rather than hinder Gambari's efforts. Kausikan said he is personally skeptical that an ASEAN envoy will help and he raised a number of questions, including regarding just how strongly Gambari himself supports the idea of an ASEAN envoy. He asked if Gambari was "just being polite" in deference to U.S. influence as a member of the P-5. Noting Gambari's success in establishing the beginnings of a dialogue between the generals and the opposition and a measure of trust with both sides, Kausikan said it was important to ensure any

initiatives complement and not obstruct Gambari's efforts. Calling the plans of French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner to visit Burma a "bad idea," he cautioned that overlapping diplomatic initiatives would provide the regime an opportunity to play one emissary off against another.

¶4. (C) Kausikan said Burma would show "no respect" for someone like former Philippine President Ramos, whom the regime would dismiss as representing U.S. views. Former Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas seemed like a better choice, but in fact he got nowhere in his previous role as President Yudhoyono's special envoy. The Burmese leadership would not even agree to meet with Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar when he tried to visit on behalf of ASEAN, Kausikan said.

¶5. (C) The CDA said the ASEAN Chair's tough statement in New York had put pressure on China to be more helpful. Kausikan conceded the point, but argued that ASEAN's direct leverage with Burma was "very limited." He thought ASEAN could do the most good by pressing Burma "around the edges" while urging China, Japan and India to do more. Kausikan observed that China had been "not too bad in the Security Council," but that India was "lost in a time warp" on Burma. Meanwhile, Singapore had its hands full trying to keep all the ASEAN "cats in a box" on Burma. He characterized Singapore's success in getting agreement on the tough Chairman's statement as a one-off event aided by revulsion at ongoing events in Burma, and said some ASEAN members were already getting "cold feet" over the grouping's toughened stance.

¶6. (C) The CDA urged that Singapore and ASEAN not let the pressure ease on the Burmese regime. Kausikan said Singapore and ASEAN will continue their efforts. He reiterated that

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the GOS will consider carefully the idea of an ASEAN envoy.

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